Alcoholism Tx Not a Primary Care Concern

BY DAMIAN MCNAMARA
Miami Bureau

Primary care physicians are not very confident that medications to treat people with alcoholism will be effective: Only 26% of 300 general practitioners and internists taking an online survey thought medication would be effective or very effective.

The survey results also showed that many physicians do not address risk with patients. “Exactly half of doctors do not ask their patients about alcohol use,” Al- lan Rivlin said during a teleconference on alcoholism sponsored by the Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America.

The 50% of physicians who inquire about alcohol consumption only do so half of the time or less. Reasons for this include a lack of resources (48%), patient denial (41%), and a belief that alcoholism is not their area of expertise (24%).

“The big clinical picture is there is a large population in this country with alcohol use disorders—18 million—and the large population in this country with alcohol use disorders—18 million—and the large population in this country with alcohol use disorders—18 million—and the large population in this country with alcohol use disorders—18 million—and the large population in this country with alcohol use disorders—18 million—and the large population in this country with alcohol use disorders—18 million—and the large population in this country with alcohol use disorders—18 million—and the large population in this country with alcohol use disorders—18 million—and the large population in this country with alcohol use disorders—18 million—and the large population in this country with alcohol use disorders—18 million—and the large population in this country with alcohol use disorders—18 million—and the large population in this country with alcohol use disorders—18 million—and the large population in this country with alcohol use disorders—18 million—and the large population in this country with alcohol use disorders—18 million—and the large population in this country with alcohol use disorders—18 million—and the large population in this county with alcohol use disorders—18 million,” said Mr. Rivlin, senior vice president of Peter D. Hart Research Associates, the firm that conducted the online survey.

“People are concerned, anxious, over-whelmed, desperate. These medications give you a chance to bring them back into the fray,” said Drew Pinsky, M.D., medical director of the department of chemical de-pendency services at Los Encinas Hospital in Pasadena, Calif.

Despite the availability of medications, only 139,000 people in the United States are prescribed a drug to treat alcohol de-pendence or abuse, according to Alan Lesher, Ph.D., chief executive officer of the American Association for the Ad-
vancement of Science in Washington.

Just over half of physicians, 51%, re-
ported prescribing disulfiram (Antabuse) at some point, and 26% said they currently prescribe the agent. A total of 26% have experience with naltrexone (Revia), and 15% have experience with the newest medication, acamprosate (Campral).

Mr. Rivlin added, “Do you have experience pre-
scribing newer medications are much more likely to believe they are effective.”

Mr. Rivlin said. For example, of physicians who have prescribed acamprosate, 45% believe it will lead to recovery, compared with 25% of nonprescribers.

“I use Campral a lot, almost exclusive-
lly at this point,” Dr. Pinsky said. Although it does not work in all patients, when it does work, it works fast—in the first 24-48 hours—and the “effect is rather start-
ning,” he added.

Naltrexone blocks the euphoria experi-
enced by alcoholics. It works best in a sub-
population of patients, and the challenge is identifying patients who will respond, Dr. Pinsky said. “I do not have a lot of use for Antabuse,” Dr. Pinsky said. “My patients, if they want to use, do not take their Antabuse.”

Most primary care physicians indicated that they refer patients with unhealthy drinking habits. Specifically, 49% refer such patients to a treatment facility, coun-
selor, another doctor, or an addiction spe-
cialist. In addition, 20% refer to support groups. Only 13% recommend a combi-
nation of medication and counseling.

Dr. Pinsky said. Although asked if addiction to alcohol was primar-
ily a disease/health problem, 56% of physicians agreed, 34% of the general public agreed, and 81% of people in re-
covery agreed. When asked if addiction to alcohol was primarily a personal/moral weak-
ness, 9% of physicians agreed, 19% of the general public agreed, and 25% of people in recovery agreed. When asked if both play a role equally, 34% of physicians agreed, 44% of the general public agreed, and 9% of people in recovery agreed.

Alcoholism is not the primary health concern among physicians or the general public, according to the survey. Respondents were more concerned with obesity, cancer, and heart disease, with depression, AIDS, and drug addiction also outranking alcoholism as top health priorities.

Veterinary Drug Clenbuterol Found to Contaminate Heroin

BY JEFF EVANS
Senior Writer

A typical reaction to heroin in users in five states have been attributed to contamination with the β-2 adrenergic receptor agonist clenbuterol, according to a report from the Centers for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The 26 cases reported from January through April in Connecticut, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, and South Carolina are the “first published accounts of poisoning from clenbuterol associated with reported heroin use” (MMWR 2005;54:793-6).

Clenbuterol is approved for limited vet-
inary use in the United States but is also used illicitly as an alternative to anabolic steroids in humans and livestock because it can increase muscle mass, the report noted. The cases “likely represent a frac-
tion of actual cases of clenbuterol poi-
sioning,” since patients might not undergo distribution or the adulteration of multiple sources, or if the substance used by each patient was heroin contaminated with clenbuterol or pure clenbuterol sold as heroin. In the mid 1990s, heroin adul-
terated with scopolamine caused wide-
spread poisoning in four states (MMWR 1996:45:457-60).